

David Pilling, *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival*
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RE-SELLING JAPAN

'Japan is not interesting': thus the literary scholar Masao Miyoshi could, with a twist of irony, entitle an essay on his native country a decade and a half ago. The dramas that have since beset Japan might serve to qualify Miyoshi's provocation. In 2011, the fifth most powerful earthquake ever recorded thrust parts of the archipelago four metres to the east and jolted the country back to the front pages. The accompanying tsunami towered forty feet high, killed twenty thousand, displaced 300,000, and ignited the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. Capitalists hoped the destruction would be creative. When the waters cleared, the LDP was returned to power under the leadership of an unlikely innovator promising to jump-start the economy and revive the country's animal spirits with bold inflationary measures. The *Economist* lost no time blazoning Abe on its cover, kitted out as Superman, punching the skies.

Economic crisis and opportunity have in the past prompted a number of leading journalists to move from broadsheet to octavo and assess the island nation. In 1989, Bill Emmott predicted in the incongruously titled *The Sun Also Sets* that Japan would continue to hold strong (a revised edition appeared within a year). The resulting doldrums encouraged Richard Katz to take the patient's temperature a decade later in *Japan: The System that Soured*; again the diagnosis—only electoral reform could shake it awake—misread the symptoms. With *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival*, David Pilling joins this group. A dozen years covering East Asia for the *Financial Times* have equipped him to update the tradition with another plotter of economic diagnosis-cum-prescription, and he pays his dues to it. Written for a non-specialist Anglosphere audience, Pilling's book is best read not just

as an example of the expanding genre of works by foreign correspondents stepping back to look at the societies where they have been posted, but also as an illustration of the ways in which Japan is changing in the neoliberal imaginary. In both respects, Pilling's tone and method are distinctive.

Bending Adversity is framed by vivid descriptions of the tsunami and its aftermath. Pilling aims to take the disaster as a starting point for a broader inquiry into how Japan's institutions and its people have dealt with comparable crises. The country's modern history has been punctuated by abrupt changes of course in response to existential threats: the revolution-from-above of the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s; the *Blitzkrieg* imperialist expansion of the 1930s and 40s; the breakneck growth that made it the world's second largest economy in the 70s and 80s; the equally dramatic bursting of its property bubble after 1989, leaving it a world leader in zombie banks and deflationary stagnation, the 'Japanese scenario' a spectre haunting the post-2008 US and EU. Might the horrors of the tsunami and the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima—plus, Pilling slips in, the rise of China—galvanize Japan's leaders into a new leap forward? In successive chapters, he examines the ideology of Japan's uniqueness, the history of the country from Meiji times to the Pacific War, the economic miracle of the post-war decades and the debacle of the nineties. He then considers the social and cultural effects of the decades of slow growth since, the ways in which it has been handled, the Koizumi years, Japan's demographic prospects, the situation of women and youth, and its diplomatic isolation. An afterword asks whether Abe will seize the chance to 'bend adversity' once again.

In substance, the book divides into three kinds of writing: reiteration, rectification, and reportage. The chapters on the post-war economy rehearse stories familiar to anyone with a newspaper habit. These follow on much stronger sections untangling the nationalist imaginary—no other nation seems more unique or homogeneous than Japan—that ties up not merely right-wingers and people on the streets, but many analysts as well, who describe the country only in terms of how different it is to everywhere else in the world. This eye for diversity keeps the reportage fresh, which is at its best in the coverage of the tsunami. The volume opens with the country upended and its contents shaken out. Pilling tells the story of the Triple Disaster in gripping style through the fate of Rikuzentakata, an ancient town whose 70,000 seaside pines were regarded as one of the scenic beauties of Japan. They resisted the 9.0 earthquake that turned the earth to liquid with the force of 600 million Hiroshima bombs, but were no defence against the tsunami which followed half an hour later. A ghostly dust—remnants of collapsed buildings—preceded the wall of mud towering over ten yards high that reduced the settlement to a churning wreckage of homes, boats, schools, hospitals, and factories. Four minutes after the

tsunami reached shore, nothing remained, and one in twenty were dead: 'It was as if the man-made world had vomited up its innards. The things that were usually hidden—piping, electric cables, mattress stuffing, metal girders, underwear, electricity generators, wiring—were suddenly on full display, like secrets expelled from the intestines of modern living.' The waves breached even the evacuation centres, sending escapees to the roof, from which they were swept away. The elderly drowned in their beds; the young, trying to rescue them.

At the other end of the book we are shown, as in some darkly comedic action film, the government and the power company in charge of Fukushima bungling clean-up efforts, concealing information, and destroying what remains of public trust. While the president of TEPCO hides in his office, the Prime Minister orders what company officials are reluctant to do—extinguish the plant but contain the meltdown by dumping seawater onto the reactors. But strong winds blow the loads dropped by helicopters back to sea. The ombudsman, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, routinely covers up accidents and ignores warning signs from safety checks. The workers who carried these out did so under abysmal conditions—almost 90 per cent of the labour force at Fukushima Daiichi was sub-contracted, or sub-sub-contracted, with the day labourers carrying out the most health-threatening jobs. The government considered evacuating Tokyo, a metropolitan area home to 35 million, but would not release reports on the amount of radiation being leaked. A terrified public was not willing to let this slide, and more than 100,000 in the capital took to the streets in recurrent protests—a story barely covered in the Japanese media, notoriously more lapdog than watchdog. The catastrophe aroused both great solidarity, of which Pilling provides moving examples, and parochial discrimination. The people of Kyoto reject funerary honours for the souls of the dead in Rikuzentakata, fearing that, if burned, the wooden slats bearing their post-mortem names would contaminate the ancient capital. The rural mayor in Tohoku responds not with bitterness, but with the dignity and decorum that are rarely far from social interactions in Japan.

In handling these dramatic events, Pilling's anthropological sensibility, his gifts of empathy and observation, serve his journalism well. For the most part he eschews critical analysis of the sort offered by scholars such as Karel van Wolferen, Jeff Kingston, R. Taggart Murphy or Gavan McCormack. He opts instead for the role of a sympathetic listener, with a sharp ethnographic eye. Postmodern anthropologists would nod approvingly at his aim to portray Japan 'as I find it' and 'allow, wherever feasible, the Japanese to speak for themselves in all their diversity and noisy disagreement'. That meant taking the trouble to learn the language. Pilling is modest about his spoken command of it, but reading, which he succeeded in doing, is more difficult—

the orthography, after all, combines three different writing systems and requires the mastery of at least two thousand characters, each pronounced in multiple ways, enough to daunt most reporters. Its polyvalence is there in his title, taken from a Japanese saying, which without prepositions is nicely ambiguous, carrying a hint of the object as agent: bending under adversity shows resilience as much as bending adversity suggests power.

When, over the larger stretches of the book, he turns to social and economic life in non-emergency conditions, the results are more ambiguous. Reporting the devastation of the tsunami, Pilling meets and talks with humble folk: a former artisan, a pair of women running a modest café, a hotel employee. But outside the disaster zone, the social horizon narrows. No workers, no farmers, no housewives—categories outside the ken of the pink paper. The FT's business card opens many doors, but behind them are principally mirrors of its own readership—businessmen in cutting edge firms, media commentators, pop intellectuals, celebrity novelists, a couple of NGOers. They often express vivid and pungent opinions, which rarely coincide. Scholarship and the arts fare little better. One critical sociologist does feature: Yamada Masahiro, whose less than upbeat view of generational changes in Japan leaves Pilling uncomfortable. Literary critic Kato Norihiro, a regular in the *New York Times*, fails to convince him that zero growth doesn't matter, but is more wistfully appealing. The breezy, bestselling PhD student Furuichi Noritoshi, explaining that Japanese youth have never had it so good, is a better bet. Murakami Haruki trots out his well-worn sayings from the lost generation, and a pulp novelist explains women's bitter fate. As interviews go, none is dull or uninformative. But the resulting collage, which has neither up nor down, serves poorly as a roadmap of the country; it is a restricted one as well, with no unconventional features plotted. Korean-origin *Zainichi* thinker Kang Sangjung, or a heterodox financial analyst like Mikuni Akio, should not have been beyond the bureau's rolodex. Animé director Miyazaki Hayao might be more interesting to hear from than, yet again, an over-exposed Murakami.

Of course, no set of interviews could be completely representative of a country without becoming an encyclopedia. More significant is the way institutions drop out of the image of Japan conveyed by the collage of individuals. The bureaucracy, the university, the media, the unions, the parties, the employers' federation, the *yakuza*—none are present, as if his subjects simply float in the space of their own opinions. Pilling speaks at length with Funabashi Yoichi, 'an old friend' and editor of the *Asahi Shimbun*, but says not a word about the newspaper's role. In Bourdieu's terms, these are people whose field has been removed, leaving only their habitus. But these bodies, richly described, are personal only to the extent that they fit a stylized formula. Pilling doesn't conduct his interviews in their homes, and only

occasionally in their offices. Instead, a café, bar, restaurant or hotel lobby are his preferred locations, with clothes and hair-styles minutely observed, as if every day were Saturday's *Lunch with the FT*. Indeed, appearance and décor become obsessive anchor-points of his exchanges.

Fujiwara Masahiko: 'We met in a Scandinavian-style restaurant in an airy and verdant valley a world away from the sweltering heat of Tokyo . . . In his early sixties and skinny, he appeared slightly gawky, dressed in a check shirt and casual white slacks. His greying hair sprouted hither and thither like untamed weeds.' Murakami: 'I once spent an afternoon with Murakami in a quiet restaurant called Tamasaka in the Aoyama district of Tokyo. The street, like so many in this city of secret neighbourhoods, had no pavement save for a white painted line, and was flanked in parts by a large, uneven stone wall, which gave the surroundings an almost medieval flavour'; 'Murakami was wearing a deep blue suit and collarless shirt'. Kato: 'We met, suitably enough, in the lobby of a hotel built during the bubble years. It was a little too garish for its own good, and looked dated in a Japan where the understated is once more a sign of good taste'—'he was wearing blue jeans and a purple shirt'. Shimotsubo Kumiko, product of a labour market that wastes the skills of highly educated women, still comes off as an FT lunch companion: 'We met in the elegant tea room in the Imperial Hotel, a mosaic by Frank Lloyd Wright covering one wall.' Shimotsubo was 'slim and fashionably dressed with a double string of pearls draped over her sweater'. Kirino Katsuo, pulp fiction author: 'In the plush surroundings of the Fiorentina, an Italian café in the lobby of Tokyo's Grand Hyatt Hotel, where large-scale works of modern art vied for attention with the beautiful people milling about.' She was 'dressed casually in a flowery top, slacks, and cork-soled shoes'—and so on.

What is the effect on the arguments of the book? Pilling's view of the 'lost decades' is summed up in his title. Japan has not been a mere captive of adversity—economic stagnation and social disorientation—but has creatively adjusted to it. He does not assign responsibility for the late 80s bubble that followed the US Treasury's currency intervention of 1985, the 'Plaza Accord'; it is seen as an 'inevitable consequence' of rapid growth. Yet he recognizes that the impact of its bursting in 1991 was nonetheless severe. Once deflation set in, the economy hovered in a 'cryogenic state' in which GDP, stock market, price of property and cost of living remained virtually motionless for two decades. A can of soda that cost £1 in 1990 carries the same price today; the GDP was ¥476 trillion in 1991, and two decades later had barely budged to ¥477 trillion. Storing savings in a refrigerator, Pilling remarks, made more sense than putting them in a bank, since it at least avoids fees—plus the crime rate is low. International criticism has been sharp, but faced with balance-sheet recessions and declines in household

consumption, Western countries have reached for the same set of medicines that Japan concocted: massive 'quantitative easing', rock-bottom interest rates, and stimulus packages mixing public works and tax cuts. The Ministry of Finance's bank bailout of 1997—a monetary injection the same size as TARP a decade later, into an economy only a third as large as that of the US—merely kept things afloat. For now, the government has the deposits of spendthrift baby-boomers to rely on, but this cannot last forever. Those in their 30s save only 5 per cent of their paycheck, where their parents put away one-quarter. Public borrowing is now 230 per cent of GDP, and pumping fluids into a comatose patient cannot continue forever.

Yet Japanese bonds remain a safe haven, even with ten-year yields below 1 per cent. In real per capita income, Japan actually did slightly better than the UK and US over the 2002–12 decade—0.9 per cent annual growth, compared to 0.8 per cent in the US and 0.7 per cent in the UK—if in part because a decline in population has dulled the impact of economic stagnation. More strikingly, many of the social ills facing other capitalist countries appear only in minor form in Japan. The streets are safe, social services have not yet been sliced, and the number of jobless has again fallen below five per cent of the labour force. The youth unemployment rate, now a 'high' eight per cent, is a figure most European countries can only dream of. If the West as a whole is now entering a period of drastically reduced growth, might not Japan prove a precursor whose ability to cope with it may become the envy of other societies?

Pilling is careful to hedge his judgements with a well-connected reporter's string of 'analysts said' and 'it appeared that'—assessment must come from the mouths of others. The quest for journalistic balance that tells us in one breath that Japan is 'resilient and adaptive' and in the next that 'it has perhaps lost something of itself' matches his use of interview material only too well once he moves to social and demographic issues. In the place of argument or prescription, the reader gets a cacophony of random voices. The result is a general tendency to analytic flip-flopping, sampling without synthesis. On the one hand, labour market deregulation is closing the doors to lifetime employment, and the tradeoff for choice is insecurity. The landscape of youth is populated with 'freeters' in precarious work, the 'yutori generation' for whom anything goes, the *hikikomori* who never leave the house, the 'parasite singles' who sponge off their parents well into their 30s. But on the other: isn't there something to be said for a life-style of 'slow living' after the postwar generation's go-go work addiction? Doesn't Furuichi see a welcome 'consummatory society' of *carpe diem*? Women endure minimal childcare facilities, unequal pay—60 per cent of men's—and workplace discrimination that ranks worse than the Philippines; very few enter

parliament or upper management. But isn't a promising rebellion under way? Divorce is rising (the only direction to go from rock-bottom rates), and delayed marriage is now limiting their service as 'baby-making machines', as a Minister of Health recently described them.

The demographic outlook may seem bad, but like much else in *Bending Adversity*, it's not all that bad. An aging society is a symbol of wealth and solid medical care; low birthrates are an index of economic and educational development. Should youth who end up on limited-term contracts—now a whopping thirty per cent of all employment—enjoy a new autonomy or fear for their future? Straddling the fence prevents Pilling from putting a foot down even when it's most obviously needed. Has inequality widened? 'Not', he assures us, 'to the extent of many other nations.' In fact, Japan now ranks behind only the US and Mexico in the OECD for the gap between rich and poor. By embedding its case within global trends, Pilling blunts the gravity of the situation confronting the 20 million Japanese now living below the poverty line, in a country once fabled for a middle class that supposedly embraced 90 per cent of the population.

His coverage of politics is another story. By temperament, Pilling appears to be rather unpolitical—not in the sense of having no politics, but of taking conventional wisdom so much for granted that politics is not of great concern to him. His interest lies elsewhere. What attracts him in any field are swashbuckling types who ignore naysayers to risk innovation and drive the country forward—Ito in the Meiji period, Morita of Sony in the post-war years, Mikitani of Rakuten in the new century. Thus, for him, political time begins in 2001 with the election of Koizumi Junichiro, the 'samurai with a quiff'. Under his 'extraordinary premiership', Japan saw 'a mini-growth and productivity boom' as he reined in bad loans, deregulated the labour market, cut public spending and in an epic battle—falling on this bloated piggybank with a butcher's axe—pushed through legislation to privatize the postal savings system. 'A rare blend of aplomb and conviction politics', Koizumi was not just 'the most exceptional prime minister' in post-war history, whose ultimate resignation at the height of his power was 'a heroic gesture'; looking back, he was in many ways 'Japan's Barack Obama'.

At the time Pilling was issuing this guff in Tokyo, his paper in London was hailing Blair in much the same fashion. But among neo-liberal politicians, Koizumi was not only one of the most overblown, but probably the most ineffective. Calling an election on a Post Office privatization bill—supposedly the key to the country's future—he had not even read, his scheme was a dead letter as soon as he was gone. His legacy was little more than an increase in the country's precariat. Lamely conceding that 'people appeared not to miss his policies', Pilling insists that all the same,

'there was nostalgia for the man.' How much nostalgia was shown this year, when his return to the political scene was ignominiously routed in Tokyo's municipal elections.

For all that, Koizumi's most important legacy goes largely unnoticed in the book. As China's economy was poised to overtake Japan's, he took every opportunity to embrace the US. To maudlin renditions of Elvis songs and macho bonding with Bush, Koizumi dispatched Japanese troops to help with the occupation of Iraq, sliding the Self Defense Forces of the country towards a more offensive posture, as the US had long urged. Under him, the protectorate in the Pacific clung ever more closely to its masters in Washington. Pilling takes no notice of this development. The omission is typical of a general minimization in his analysis of America's role in the post-war history of Japan. In his narrative, the US quietly exits after the Korean War, leaving scarcely a hint of the extraordinary relationship that left two central domains of Japan's state sovereignty—overseas policy and security—in the hands of a foreign power. His claim that 'political dysfunction' arrived in the 1990s erases four decades of democratic deformity fashioned by the US in 1955 when, in the face of Socialist Party victory, it re-engineered the political system by slapping together the conservative Liberal and Democratic parties, with CIA funds piped in to secure the rural vote (under malapportionment, worth up to six times its urban counterpart). The result was virtually unbroken single-party rule for the next half century.

Wartime memories continue to fester in a region where none of the countries that suffered the most under Japanese imperialism were invited to the table at San Francisco to sign the treaty written by Dulles, ending the war, a document whose final iteration left ambiguous, among its other deficiencies, the status of both the Daioyu/Senkaku and Dokudo/Takeshima islands, hotly contested today. Pilling laments the absence of a 'Willy Brandt moment'—in 1970 the German Chancellor fell on his knees before a monument to victims of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, a spectacularly hammy gesture—but this is little surprise in a country where neither the Socialist nor Communist parties, opponents of the Emperor's wars, were allowed to touch power for long after 1955. When the JSP, after fifty years of exclusion from office, issued the first formal apology for wartime aggression by a Japanese Prime Minister in 1994, it was by then an atrophied wisp of its former self, trading a moment to adorn a coalition government for a shovel to dig its own grave. Since then, similar statements have followed, with as much regularity as declarations undermining them.

The unequal tradeoffs supporting this 'special relationship' would be questioned when factional warring in the LDP placed the newly formed Democratic Party of Japan, itself a weak patchwork of opposition groups, at the helm of state in 2009. Modeled on New Labour, the DPJ offered a

muddy platform of family-friendly and pro-consumer policies, as ideologically vague as that of the LDP it displaced. Pilling quotes a political expert who likened the choice for voters to deciding between a Nissan and a Toyota. But the DPJ's leader Hatoyama Yukio—scion, like Koizumi, of a powerful political father—did personally stand out on one issue: relations with the US. Sending a 200-strong group to Beijing to help steer a path in what he saw as a multipolar rather than monopolar world, Hatoyama sought to cut the \$4 billion annual 'host nation support fee' for the US military bases that cover twenty per cent of Okinawa, and block the transfer of Marines from Futenma to larger grounds at Henoko. Pilling spends barely four lines on this potential turning point in Japanese history. He says not a word about the virulent reaction in Washington—the pointed diplomatic snubs that turned to statements questioning the sanity of Japan's elected leader—which, combined with a relentless campaign by the *Asahi*, brought Hatoyama to heel, before casting him on the trash dump. If there was friction, Pilling suggests, it came from the 'reckless' stance of the discarded Premier.

In the same vein, when the families of a trio of Japanese youngsters held hostage on a humanitarian mission in Iraq called for the withdrawal of the Self Defense Forces from the American occupation, he is not surprised that public opinion turned against them: 'In their naivety, the three had stumbled on the hottest foreign policy issue of the day.' Any questioning of US global power, however mild, is automatically a gaffe of which only a rube could be capable. In such reactions, Pilling reveals himself to be an intellectual salaryman, as unthinking in fealty to the world outlook of his employer as those who belt out company songs on karaoke night. In his version: 'At the *Financial Times*, I must especially thank Lionel Barber, our brilliant and dynamic editor'—'I am fortunate indeed to have worked for such a fine news organization for so many years.'

Bending Adversity wraps up with an afterword on the second coming of Abe. No one expected that a leader who on his first outing, as Koizumi's handpicked successor, had lasted less than a year, leaving office under the shadow of scandal, would be seen as the great new hope; but this time, Pilling assures us, he is armed with an 'economic blunderbuss'. It is harder for him to be as enthusiastic about Abe as Koizumi since the former's version of Japanese nationalism is more radical, creating tensions with South Korea that are a headache for US attempts to coordinate a Pacific front to contain China. And his team can be remarkably tactless. Deputy Premier Aso Taro's comment that Japan has much to learn from the deft way the Third Reich reformed the Weimar constitution was an embarrassment. But the boldness of Abe's economic programme for swamping the country with cash to propel it out of deflation is 'invigorating'. Abenomics, for Pilling, is essentially a test in social constructivism: if you believe in it, there will be

growth. The cocktail to revive Japan's animal spirits combines a \$110 billion spending package, printing money to reach two per cent inflation, and further deregulation—all tried before, but never in so strong a measure. When the first two of these arrows were let loose, within six months the yen fell from ¥77 to about ¥100 to the dollar and the stock market rallied 65 per cent. Deflation made for low interest rates and easy debt service. Inflation will leave workers feeling poorer if wages do not also rise. Abe has pressed companies for pay hikes, but not gone so far as mandating an increase in the minimum wage; the 1 per cent increase by firms like Toyota will not match the blow from the sales tax doubled in April.

Yet the boldest move may be still to come. The Trans-Pacific Partnership, though in the works for several years, is given little space in the book. For Abe, it's not entirely new—he tried and failed to secure a trade pact with the US in his first term. But an expanded 'everyone but China' club has great political appeal for Keidanren and Washington. The PRC has been Japan's most important trading partner for over ten years, but as economic interdependence thickens, chauvinist impulses sharpen. Abe's 'other selling point', as Pilling puts it, is his firm stance on the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. What he doesn't discuss is the Prime Minister's long-term political agenda. Pilling chides Abe over Yasukuni visits and revisionist remarks on wartime atrocities—Abe has even questioned whether the colonial expansion in the 1930s and 40s should be termed an 'invasion'—but he doesn't discuss the far-reaching constitutional revisions the Prime Minister has sought since he first set foot in office. Altering nearly every article in the document, these would expand the scope for a state of emergency; transform the nominal Self Defence Force into a full-fledged army; and subordinate freedoms of speech, press and association to the maintenance of public order. Should this be a concern? Public support for such a radical revision may be lacking, but there are ways around it. Against widespread opposition, Abe recently handed down a reinterpretation of Article 9 that allows collective self-defence—a move that Pilling, like the nationalists in Kasumigaseki, has lauded as 'inching closer' to normality.

In Pilling's vision of Japan, the right is as absent as the left. Civil society, not political society, is the solution to the country's problems. He praises the official report on the Fukushima disaster for not blaming anyone in particular, neither officials nor institutions, but rather attitudes. To lead Japan out of the doldrums, he offers his book as 'a call to individual and collective action'. The twin crises of 1995—the great Kobe earthquake and the sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo subway—spurred a more activist engagement: why shouldn't the Triple Disaster do so as well? The hope reflects the smoothed history that scraps postwar conflict for postwar growth. In a book with as broad a sweep as Pilling's, many things must inevitably be left out, but all

the reader gets of historical challenges to the system is a dry 'labour conflict was rife'. We hear nothing of the millions on the streets in the 1960 Ampo protests against the extension in perpetuity of the Security Treaty that has kept Japan a military protectorate of the US, rammed through in a snap midnight session with police in the Diet to quell the opposition. The mass mining strikes that took place later the same year and the next, when one in ten police were sent out to quell the 'total war between labour and capital', receive no word. Nor do the students who fought pitched battles against the police over Okinawa and Vietnam. Small wonder that civil society, even in its much tamer contemporary form, fascinates the author.

What are its prospects today? 'Popular opinion', Pilling reports, 'has turned sharply against nuclear power', and a 'significant area of progress' has been the 'public right to know', in 'an accelerating push for government disclosure'. Abe's tenure has made short work of such claims. The anti-nuclear candidate for mayor of Tokyo was trounced by the LDP this winter, and a Government Secrets Act gagging the press as never before has sailed through the Diet. The sympathy with which Pilling writes about Japanese culture is obvious. But the country doesn't need a softer version—more Pollyanna than booster—of Ezra Vogel, whose flattery once produced a local best-seller.